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MONITORING OF FRANCISELLA TULARENSIS AND YERSINIA PSEUDOTUBERCULOSIS IN DANISH HARES (*LEPUS EUROPAEUS*) BY FLUORESCENT IN-SITU HYBRIDIZATION

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The National Veterinary Institute conducts general health surveillance of wildlife by examination of dead animals submitted by private individuals and government agencies from across Denmark. During 2012 and 2013, 1265 terrestrial mammals, 76 marine mammals and 262 birds were examined. A total of 59 hares (*Lepus Europaeus*) have been screened for presence of the zoonotic bacteria *Francisella tularensis* and *Yersinia pseudotuberculosis* by fluorescent in-situ hybridization (FISH). Ten hares were positive for *Y. pseudotuberculosis* and one was positive for *F. tularensis*. *F. tularensis* and *Y. pseudotuberculosis* has a wide host range and causes high mortality in hares. When it comes to zoonotic potential *F. tularensis* poses the major risk for humans, where it causes tularemia - a potentially deadly disease. FISH is an easy, cheap and not at least safe method for monitoring *F. tularensis* and *Y. pseudotuberculosis*. Health surveillance of wildlife is vital in order to track changes in disease prevalence. The frequent detection of zoonotic agents in wild hares emphasizes the importance of handling game - and especially dead wildlife - with strict hygiene.